

Romantic Mystery Of Rich Mr. French's Job As Chauffeur

Can It Be That the Smart Young Clubman Drove a Taxicab in the Hope of Stirring the Sympathies of His Ex-Wife and Her Fashionable Mother and Winning His Way Back Into the Former Eleanor Burrill's Heart?



Young Mr. French's sister, the former Julia French, who eloped with her chauffeur

WHEN fashionable society heard that Francis Ormond French, son of the rich and aristocratic Amos Tuck French and a cousin of William H. Vanderbilt, had put on a chauffeur's uniform and taken a job driving a taxicab it could hardly believe such a thing possible—not even in New York, which, as the late O. Henry often said, is as full of surprises as a nut of meat.

Going to work for a living was about the last thing any of his friends and acquaintances would have expected of this smart young clubman and Harvard graduate. And that he should choose a humble chauffeur's job and be shouting "Taxi, sir?" in front of the clubs and hotels to which he had been accustomed to ride in his limousine or expensive roadster—why, that seemed the height of absurdity.

It was, however, as society found out, nothing but the truth, with no embroidering whatever on the part of imaginative reporter or press agent. French himself admitted that he was now just a plain, hard-working chauffeur—a chauffeur with a union card, hustling for fares, defying the traffic rules and holding out his grimy hand for tips like any immigrant son of the tenements.

But what had impelled him to quit his easy ways of life and take, of all things, a taxicab chauffeur's job? That was the mystery and one that puzzled society as much as anything has for a long time.

French himself declared it was because he was hard up and could think of no better way of earning some money than by turning his experience as a motorist to good account at the wheel of a taxicab.

This explanation, however, did not sound reasonable to those who know what fine social connections the young man has and how many powerful friends in the business and financial world. There were too many easier ways out of his financial difficulties.

Now the gossips, who are never content to let anything connected with any of the smart set remain long a mystery, have discovered what they believe to be the real reason for French's turning chauffeur—and a very romantic and unusual reason it is.

It was, they say, because he hoped his appearance in a chauffeur's uniform would stir the sympathies of Mrs. Edward Livingston Burrill and her daughter, Eleanor, and perhaps pave the way for him to win his way back into the latter's heart.

The former Eleanor Livingston Burrill is the wife who divorced young Mr. French a few months ago for a variety of alleged offenses against the standards of conduct that are supposed to govern good husbands.

At the time of the divorce he did not seem at all cast down over the loss of his fashionable and good-looking wife, but later on he is said to have begun to pine for her companionship, and also for the advantages which a connection with her wealthy family gave a man whose own family is not so well-to-do as it used to be. And the taxicab job is said to have been his novel plan for bringing about a resumption of his relations with the Burrills.



Mr. French courteously helping a woman passenger into the cab—but not the ex-wife or mother-in-law whom he is thought to have hoped to have some day for a fare

Supposing Mrs. Burrill and her daughter saw him laboriously shifting his gears through the endless densities of traffic; supposing they happened some day to step into the very cab he was driving; supposing they only read about what he was doing in the newspapers—in any event, how could their hearts help overflowing with sympathy at the thought of a former son-in-law and husband of theirs being reduced to such straits?

Once the sympathy of his former wife and her proud mother was aroused, so many think, Mr. French believed the rest would be easy. That would be the first step toward the reconciliation with Eleanor which he is said to have hoped for.

The first clew to the suspicion that this was the black man in the woodpile of Mr. French's taxicab job is said to have come when some of his fellow-chauffeurs noted how persistently he stuck to the vicinity of Fifth Avenue and Fifty-second Street in his endless cruising about for fares.

This was regarded as a highly significant fact, for the Burrills' New York residence, at 32 West Fifty-second Street, is only a few doors from this corner.

Did Mr. French think that when he drove so frequently in this vicinity his former wife and her mother could hardly fail some time to see him? Did he nurse the hope that some day they actually would hail his cab, and then be shocked with surprise and regret to recognize the familiar figure on the driver's seat?

This romantic explanation of the mystery became still more plausible when

French expressed to the manager of the taxicab company for which he was working the hope that on a certain day a few weeks later his cab might be assigned to duty at a certain ocean steamship pier.

It was from this pier, as French admitted, that his former wife's mother, Mrs. Burrill, was to sail for Europe. And he hinted that the presence of his cab there on the sailing day might result in something that would, as he expressed it, "make good publicity" for his employers.

When the manager said he was more interested in keeping his cabs earning money than in getting publicity French seemed greatly disappointed. He asked for a couple of days off, and when next he appeared it was not to take his cab out again, but to quit the job. He turned in his chauffeur's cap, collected the \$17 in wages that were due him and was off to nobody knows what other employment, if any.

Why did young Mr. French suddenly abandon the job he had taken only five days before with such a display of earnest enthusiasm?

Was it because after cruising so much in the vicinity of Fifth Avenue and Fifty-second Street he had become discouraged over the prospect of catching a glimpse of his former wife and her mother?

Or was it because he had seen them, but had failed to bring to their faces the glances of sympathy or even friendly recognition he had hoped for?

French's job as a chauffeur lasted just five days. In that time he earned \$17 in wages and something less in tips—very



Francis Ormond French as he looked in the taxicab, which it is suspected he ran for a reason far more romantic than earning a living

made no impression whatever, or perhaps only an unfavorable one, he gave it up in disgust and returned to his clubs.

If he had clung to the steering wheel of his cab only a few days longer he might have had for a fare his distinguished aunt, Lady Chylesmore. She was then on her way here from England, to be a guest at the wedding of another nephew of hers, William H. Vanderbilt.

But by the time her ladyship's steamer docked Nephew Francis was out of the taxicab business for good, and so she missed the opportunity of seeing what a fine, manly appearance he made in his chauffeur's uniform and how expertly he threaded his way through the thickest traffic.

Whatever young Mr. French's merits or demerits as a husband, everybody with a heart for romance will feel sorry that his supposed plans for bringing about a reconciliation with his former wife did not turn out as many suspect he hoped they would.

What a scene that reconciliation would have made for a novel or the movies! The taxicab cruising slowly up Fifth Avenue, with Francis French on the driver's seat, sadly thinking of days that were,

His former wife, passing on the pavement, nearly faints as she thinks she recognizes under the grime of this chauffeur's face the familiar features of her ex-husband.

A second look convinces her that it is really he, and tears fill her eyes to think he is reduced to this.

She rushes to the curb, waves her hand at him, calls him frantically by name.

The chauffeur, too, is overcome with emotion as he recognizes the wife who divorced him. His hands tremble so that he can hardly turn the steering wheel and apply the brake.

As he brings the cab to a squeaky



Lady Chylesmore, who arrived from England just too late to see what a fine taxi driver her nephew made

stop the ex-wife springs up beside him and throws her forgiving arms about his neck.

This is the way it undoubtedly would have happened in the movies, but in real life the plot did not turn out like that at all. There was a singular lack of response from the young woman who is supposed to have been cast for the heroine's role, and without her what more could the hero have done than he did?

As far as can be learned, the only satisfaction Mr. French can get out of his novel experience as a taxi chauffeur is the knowledge that he has done something quite as spectacular and out of the ordinary as the performances for which many other members of his distinguished family have long been famous.

His sister, Julia French, eloped with Jack Geraghty, son of a Newport cab driver and himself a chauffeur who had been employed to teach Julia to drive her motor car.

A brother, now dead, fell in love with a New England telephone operator while she was putting through a long-distance call for him and they were married that same evening.

Even young Mr. French's distinguished father, Amos Tuck French, furnished the public with a few thrills of surprise over the way he divorced one wife and married a second.

The frequency with which the members of this aristocratic family fall into and out of their unfortunate love affairs has long been a matter of comment.

Probably nobody was more disappointed over Francis French's sudden quitting of his job than his fellow-chauffeurs and the pretty stenographers and cashiers in the company's office. They had counted so much on having this full-fledged member of the Four Hundred attend the annual chauffeurs' ball and making this affair by his presence a memorable one.

The former Eleanor Livingston Burrill, who divorced Mr. French



good, his employers said, for a new man in the game.

But the gossips feel sure it was not the money or the desire to be doing something useful that inspired French's venture into the workaday world. They think he braved the gasoline-filled air of the city streets for the sole purpose of arousing the Burrills' sympathy for him and in the hope that he would thus be able to work his way back into Eleanor's heart.

It has been suggested that the two days' leave of absence he asked for just as he was getting well accustomed to his new job may have been devoted to finding out just what impression he had succeeded in making through his spectacular appeal for sympathy.

Finding that his chauffeur's job had